



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATIVE SERVICES

2012 Vocational Rehabilitation and Supported Employment Plan Public Comments

The following are the comments received from the public during the Department of Rehabilitative Services' (DRS) 2012 public comment period. These comments were collected at the four public hearings held around the Commonwealth and by email.

These comments have been shared with DRS management and with the members of the State Rehabilitation Council for consideration into the development of the 2013 State Plan for Vocational Rehabilitation and Supported Employment and other agency planning efforts.

Many thanks to all those who took the time to attend the one of the public hearings or to submit comments in writing.

Public Comment 1: There needs to be enhanced coordination between DRS and schools to serve students in transition. I work with youth at a Center for Independent Living and I find that students have met the requirements for graduation, but do not have the job skills to become employed. I'm not seeing DRS counselors at transition meetings.

Agency Response: DRS agrees that it is important for students existing high school to be job ready or moving towards job readiness. For this to occur, there must be collaboration between the school, the student, the student's parent(s), and the VR program regarding the development of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). DRS has 38 vocational rehabilitation counselors whose sole job is to serve youth in transition and an additional 55 counselors who work with both youth and adults. These counselors cover all of the public high schools in every Local Education Agency. While not every school can be frequently visited (because of referral rates, distance, etc.), DRS has a presence in the public schools across Virginia. However, by law, the VR counselor must be invited to the IEP meetings by the parent or guardian of the student. If this invitation does not occur, or short notice of the meeting does not allow for the counselor to attend, then the necessary collaboration is affected. A large section of DRS' State Plan is dedicated to goals, strategies, and collaborative activities to enhance transition services.

Public Comment 2: Has DRS ever considered having a consumer-directed job coach? Also, it seems that it would be cost beneficial to allow a personal attendant to serve as a

job coach. There are times when both the personal attendant and the job coach are present at the job site with the client. This does not seem to be cost effective.

Agency Response: While having a job coach and a personal assistant on the job site at the same time may not appear to be cost effective, they are there for two different reasons, one for attending to a consumer's personal needs, the other for job assessment and training. The relationship that exists with a job coach must be seen as a partnership between the employer, the consumer and the job coach. The employer establishes the expectations of the job and the consumer works with the job coach to learn the tasks necessary to be successful on the job. DRS has a long standing requirement that all job coaches/employment specialists be employed by Employment Service Organizations that are CARF accredited in order to meet required service delivery standards. The job coaches are trained in job analysis, job development, behavioral intervention techniques and other placement and training skills. These skills and abilities are quite different from assisting in activities of daily living which is the primary role of a personal assistant.

Public Comment 3: How can Centers for Independent Living and the VR program better collaborate and coordinate on client cases?

Agency Response: Based on past experiences, it appears that the key to effective collaboration and coordination on client cases between the VR program and the Centers for Independent Living is the relationship built between the two programs. In some instances, some very effective relationships have been built which benefit the consumers we mutually serve. In other instances, the relationship is not as strong and could be improved. One suggestion heard at a public hearing (see below) is that VR staff and CIL staff benefit from attending training activities together. This allows for interaction and the sharing of information and ideas. Another effective strategy is for the VR Office Manager and the CIL Director to plan periodic meetings to discuss ways to enhance collaboration and coordination. To address this concern, a strategy has been between added under Goal 6 in the State's Strategies Attachment of the State Plan to encourage expanded training opportunities between VR staff and the CILs to enhance joint service provision.

Public Comment 4: I have found much more willingness of counselors to work with the Centers for Independent Living in the Tidewater area. Joint trainings have been very effective in fostering this relationship.

Agency Response: Thank you for this comment and DRS is pleased to hear about the collaboration between the VR staff and the Center for Independent Living. It sounds like the joint training concept has been an effective means to enhancing communication and collaboration.

Public Comment 5: In the State Plan, there needs to be more action steps or goals and objectives on the collaboration between the Centers for Independent Living and VR.

Agency Response: DRS would look forward to hearing more from the Centers for Independent Living on this suggestion. As this will require more dialogue and sharing of ideas, the suggestion would best be addressed in the 2014 State Plan. However, in an initial step to address part of this concern in the 2013 State Plan, a strategy has been added under Goal 6 in the State's Strategies Attachment to encourage expanded training opportunities between VR staff and CILs to enhance joint service provision.

Public Comment 6: There needs to be greater coordination between DRS, the Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center, and the Veterans Administration in serving disabled veterans.

Agency Response: DRS supports the need for continued coordination and cooperation with Federal and State entities on serving disabled veterans. WWRC has seen an increase in the number of veterans enrolling in WWRC over the past six months and will continue to emphasize the availability of its services for veterans through the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program in Blueprint IV, pursuing the following in the coming year: .

- Participation in the Executive strategy committee of the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program. The DRS Commissioner, WWRC Director and VA representatives are included in the membership of the committee; and*
- Negotiating a pilot project to meet an unmet need through a partnership with the Department of Defense to provide vocational evaluations for current soldiers that are transitioning out of the military.*

Public Comment 7: I live in Planning District 9, in the Culpeper area, and have a child with a disability. I find that a lot of people with disabilities want to work, but the waiting list for waivers, especially those that pay for supported employment, is a deterrent. There are too many people on the waiver waiting lists. In addition, DRS has a waiting list.

Agency Response: It is important that all state agencies that provide services to Virginians with disabilities hear about the concerns regarding service provision and the effect of waiting lists on these individuals. Therefore, it is recommended that the issue regarding the waiver waiting list be addressed to the Department of Medical Assistance Services. As to the waiting list for vocational rehabilitation consumers, DRS is pleased that it has been offering services to consumers on the waiting list who are most significantly disabled. In addition, effective June 1, the most significantly disabled category under our Order of Selection will be opened which will allow for newly eligible individuals to receive services.

Public Comment 8: I am a VR client and I need a modification to my van in order to be employed. My counselor told me that I have to have a job first before DRS will pay for my van modification. Is this correct policy?

Agency Response: By policy, a vehicle modification must support the consumer's overall rehabilitation program and the achievement of the established vocational goal found in the consumer's Individualized Plan for Employment. There are other criteria in policy that also would need to be considered, such as whether there are other available

transportation options. The concern of this consumer has been shared with the counselor and her supervisor.

Public Comment 9: I would like to see more cross over between housing programs and the programs at DRS. I receive a small income that interferes with my ability to access other programs.

Agency Response: The issue that you have raised is systemic in nature and can be quite complicated and frustrating for the individual(s) involved. Fortunately, DRS has been involved in some initiatives to help address the housing situation in Virginia for people with disabilities and the aging population. DRS' Office of Community Integration and the Virginia Department for the Aging were instrumental in the development of Virginia's Blueprint for Livable Communities. The objective of the Blueprint is to share information that will help generate necessary conversations and new connections at the local and regional level on how community livability can be achieved. The key is not necessarily the document that is produced, but the process that takes place when requisite local experts come together for the common goal of a livable community. DRS also is involved in numerous cross-agency groups looking at housing options for Virginians with disabilities. Many of these cross-agency groups include consumer representation in an effort to personalize the issue and to make sure the voice of those directly affected are heard.

Public Comment 10: I went to the DRS website, intending to access it from the source. Having obtained a doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology, and having completed many a research paper and project and in my time, I'm no stranger to searching for data. I have to tell you, however, that after twenty minutes of futile and frustrating searching, I gave up looking for a clearly identifiable current State Plan, let alone somewhere related that solicited public comment. As a non-disabled, highly experienced researcher, if my experience trying to provide input was unsuccessful, what do you suppose the experience of someone with a challenging disability is like?

Sadly, this experience mirrors my experience with DRS in general. My son is 21 years old and has both autism and an intellectual disability. Here in Williamsburg where we live, our interface with our local DRS office has been one revolving door of constantly changing vocational counselors over the past five years. No sooner is one person hired, than they are off to training for six weeks. Then it seems they are bogged down with paperwork, or there is no money available for services. And then- poof- they have either quit or are transferred somewhere else and the whole cycle starts again with someone new. The only exception to this sad rotation is the current counselor who is already a known entity, having moved from a previous position in the community where he was already well known for being ineffectual to now being further "under the radar" and just as ineffectual.

I do want to compliment one of your employees, however, a young lady whose name I forgot but who is based in Richmond and who specializes in working with individuals

with autism. I've had the pleasure of seeing her present several times and she is excellent!

Agency Response: DRS apologizes for the problem regarding the publication of the draft State Plan on the agency's website. Thank you for bringing this matter to our attention so that it could be quickly corrected. In response to the concerns about the services to your son, you are correct that the Williamsburg Office has experienced some unfortunate staff turnover over the last few years. Hopefully, this situation will be alleviated for the future. In addition, the budget situation has greatly improved this year, which is very good news for our consumers. Thank you for your kind comment about the counselor in Richmond. We know who whom you speak and she has a lot of experience working with individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders.